

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 14, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015-16 Wolf Regulations and Landowner Take Quota– Proposed

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed for Presentation: 45 minutes

Background: Regulated public hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. The foundations of that plan are to recognize wolves as a native species and a part of our wildlife heritage, to manage wolves similar to other species such as mountain lions, to manage adaptively, and to address and resolve conflicts. Montana's current wolf management is a success story in that we have maintained a healthy, viable, well-distributed wolf population while at the same time reducing conflicts and livestock losses. At the end of 2014 there were a known minimum of 544 wolves in the state (there are known to be more wolves, but this is the number that could actually be counted and verified), down from a high of 653 wolves in 2011. The number of wolf-related complaints and livestock losses to wolves has also declined in recent years. During the peak year of 2009 there were 233 complaints and 309 livestock lost to wolves; in 2014 there 92 complaints and 41 head of livestock lost.

Montana has had a wolf hunting season since 2009 (except for 2010 by court order) and a trapping season since 2012. There were 206 wolves legally harvested in Montana during the 2014-15 season, 130 by hunters and 76 by trappers. This compares to a high of 230 (143 by hunters and 87 by trappers) taken in 2013. In addition 6 wolves representing a "potential threat" to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs were taken by landowners or their agents from July 2014 to present.

The current wolf hunting and trapping regulations are an archery-only season from the beginning of the deer/elk archery season until September 14th, a general hunting season from September 15th to March 15th, and a trapping season from December 15th to February 28th. The per-person bag limit is 5 except in WMU 110 near Glacier National Park and in WMUs 313 and 316 near Yellowstone National Park where it is 1 per person. There are also total harvest quotas in these three WMUs of 2 in WMU 110 and 3 each in WMUs 313 and 316. The annual quota for landowners or their agents to take wolves on deeded property representing a "potential threat" to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs is proposed to be 100 total with each increment of 25 needing approval by the Commission.

There are no proposed changes to the wolf hunting and trapping seasons for 2015-16 or to the quota for landowner take, all season structures are proposed to remain unchanged from the 2014–15 wolf season.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment would be taken until 5 p.m., June 29. Final adoption would take place at the July Commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: The proposals may be approved as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2014–15 per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission direction

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: This status-quo proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, livestock depredation trends, survey efforts, and public comment. It is consistent with wolf season objectives, it considers the management of other species, and it continues to value wolves as an integral part of functioning ecosystems. The proposal is consistent with the Montana Gray Wolf Management Plan.

Proposed Motion: I move the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2015-16 wolf regulations and landowner take quota as presented by FWP.